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SUBJECT: GOF: KAKAHK 2009 OSCE BID AND MORE ENGAGEMENT IN
CENTRAL ASIA

REF: A. PARIS 2197

[¶](#)B. STATE 80727

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Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT FOR REASO
NS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[¶](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The MFA's Central Asia desk officer told us June 11 that the GOF's relationship with Central Asia was changing, but not dramatically. The key element: Central Asia policy would no longer depend on Chirac's personal relationship with Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev. France was working closely with the EU, and would continue to support EU Special Representative for the region (and retired French diplomat) Pierre Morel as he undertook to implement the soon-to-be adopted EU Central Asia strategy. After 14 years of neither a French Presidential nor Foreign Minister visit to the region, the its 2008 EU Presidency was an opportunity for France to show a little more interest. The GOF has not yet come to a policy decision on Kazakhstan's 2009 OSCE chairmanship bid, notwithstanding former FM Douste-Blazy's December 2006 EU intervention in apparent support of the Kazakhs.

[¶](#)2. (C) SUMMARY CONTINUED: Poloff also sought and obtained the GOF's support in convincing SCO countries to avoid any negative positioning on U.S. and allied military installations in Central Asia (ref B). END SUMMARY.

INCREASED ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

[¶](#)3. (C) MFA Central Asia desk officer, Helene Roos, told poloff on June 11 that the GOF's relationship with Central Asia was changing with the new French government, while cautioning us not to expect a dramatic shift, given that the region was still "quite far from Paris." Chirac's relationship with Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev had long defined the GOF's engagement in Central Asia, she said, and so Chirac's departure naturally meant a shift in perspective. While the GOF would still likely follow the German "lead" in the region, it would also be playing a key role in implementing the EU Central Asia strategy on the ground.

¶4. (C) France, she explained, will hold the local EU Presidency in Astana and Ashgabat from July 2007 through December 2008, and would also hold the local EU Presidency in Dushanbe and Tashkent from January 2008 through December 2008. (Note: Portugal and Slovenia do not have embassies in Central Asia, and therefore need a local representative during their EU presidencies. France will fill this role in the lead up to its own presidency in July 2008-December 2008.

France's accredited Ambassador to Bishkek is in Astana.) France, she said, recently passed the message to Central Asian governments that neither a French President nor a Foreign Minister had visited the region in 14 years and that the GOF saw the EU presidency as a possible opportunity to step up engagement.

KAZAKHSTAN 2009 OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP BID

¶5. (C) Roos informed us that the GOF had taken no formal position on Kazakhstan's candidacy for the 2009 OSCE chairmanship. Despite former FM Douste-Blazy's December 2006 EU intervention on the subject, which some Kazakhs interpreted as a de-facto endorsement of their candidacy, France continued to carefully study the issue. Some in the MFA, she said, believed that supporting Kazakhstan's 2009 bid was particularly important to Russia's support for the OSCE during a difficult and complicated period (see reftel A). Others, she insisted, were not convinced of this argument. FM Kouchner did not yet appear wedded to either position.

¶6. (C) Roos said that the GOF, like others, had tried to encourage the Kazakhs to withdraw their candidacy while they instituted democratic reforms, but that this strategy did not appear to be productive. She asked if the U.S. had engaged the Kazakhs on the substance of their proposed chairmanship. Roos argued that positive engagement with the Kazakhs on

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their substantive program might demonstrate our commitment to their candidacy in principle-- something that could help us argue for delay. Roos also stressed that Astana's complete lack of substantive proposals for its chairmanship provided additional reasons to ask the Kazakhs to withdraw their 2009 bid and delay until 2011. 2011 was the latest possible date, she added, as Nazarbayev is not likely to relent unless he has sufficient confidence that the Kazakhstan chairmanship would occur before Nazarbayev's reelection campaign in 2012.

¶7. (C) The Germans, Roos insisted, were the key in obtaining EU support for a recommendation to Astana that it withdraw its candidacy for 2009. The GOF, she said, would not want to risk further EU divisions concerning Central Asia, and was in a difficult position as long as Germany supported Astana's bid. She explained that following the renewal of sanctions against Uzbekistan, many of her contacts (including the Uzbeks) confirmed that Berlin informed Tashkent that the renewal was "not our fault" and "against our counsel." Roos suggested that Paris could probably still be convinced to put more pressure on the Kazakhs if Berlin showed some movement in its position. Roos very frankly noted that most GOF officials did not believe a Kazakh chairmanship was ideal for the OSCE, but that the organization might face more damage if only a handful of Western countries opposed the Kazakh bid. EU unity on the issue, she added, would probably be the only way France could oppose Kazakh's candidacy.

HELLO ASHGABAT, WE'RE BACK

¶8. (C) Engaging Turkmenistan, Roos told us, was a key element in France's thinking about Central Asia. Like many U.S. officials, Roos said she believed that there was a window of opportunity to engage Ashgabat in constructive dialogue and promote reform. As the local EU President in Ashgabat for

the next 18 months, the GOF was examining its priorities in line with the EU strategy, Roos said, and she hoped that Washington and Paris would increase their cooperation in the country. Turkmen officials, she added, never failed to point out that high ranking U.S. diplomats were in Ashgabat "every month." Roos informed us that Turkmen FM Rashid Meredov would likely be coming to France in October, followed by Turkmen President Berdimuhamedov in November 2007. The French FM may return the visit during France's EU Presidency (July-December 2008). A Presidential visit by Sarkozy has not been ruled out, but is not currently in the works.

SCO

¶9. (S//NF) Poloff informed Roos that the U.S. would be encouraging Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) members to avoid any statements or actions during their August 2007 meeting that might complicate the use of military bases in Central Asia for countries participating in Operation Enduring Freedom (ref B). Roos noted that she understood the importance of Manas Air Base and said that the French base in Dushanbe was also vital to their contributions in Afghanistan. France, she added, supported our efforts without any reservations. Roos agreed that unity on the issue was important and would see if a similar demarche by the GOF could be delivered.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Roos seemed to indicate that some new GOF officials could still be convinced to put additional pressure on Kazakhstan to withdraw its bid for the 2009 OSCE chairmanship. Without a change in Berlin's position, however, Paris does not seem likely to use its political capital on this particular issue.

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